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THE GARDEN IS ALWAYS GREENER...

BILLY HALL

Abstract

This essay builds upon a case study of community gardening in Miami to explore the extent to which these gardens are contributing to, and possibly triggering, processes of gentrification within low to lower-middle income neighborhoods. Through a literature review of recent urban planning policy and development in Miami and relevant discourse on the neoliberalization of food, food politics, food justice activism, and gentrification, I situate Miami's gardens within a complex, multi-scalar web of ideas and processes. I show how the interaction of these forces, varying dramatically with respect to place, is implicit in the motivations for each garden's development and creates a unique context for the production of a "garden community." I then critically examine the impacts these gardens – and the respective communities they produce – have within the larger community of the neighborhoods and places in which they are located. Secondly, with the intent to help bridge the disconnect between food justice and broader social movements, I engage the Environmental Justice Movement literature as a pathway toward exploring possibilities for mitigating gentrification and the physical displacement of vulnerable people. Thus, by learning from the key factors vital to the successes of the Environmental Justice Movement, food justice advocates can better conceptualize and build alternative food initiatives *with*, and not *for*, marginalized communities.

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Corresponding Author Information:

Billy Hall, whall002@fiu.edu
Florida International University
Global and Sociocultural Studies

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University of Tennessee
914 McClung Tower
Knoxville, Tennessee
37996-0490

THE GARDEN IS ALWAYS GREENER...

BILLY HALL

The late activist, Karl Linn, once wrote, “Community gardens can be seen as forerunners of urban gentrification—Trojan Horses setting in motion processes that will displace people of lesser means” (1999). Though his argument is compelling, it has yet to inspire much grounded research that supports, refutes, or, more importantly, complicates and analyzes these claims with respect to place and within the contexts of neoliberal urban governance and food justice politics. This paper, thus, has two aims. First, building on a case study of community gardens in Miami, I explore the extent to which these gardens are contributing to, and possibly triggering, processes of gentrification within low to lower-middle income neighborhoods. Through a literature review of recent urban planning policy and development in Miami and relevant discourse on the neoliberalization of food, food politics, food justice activism, and gentrification, I situate Miami’s gardens within a complex, multi-scalar web of ideas and processes. I then show how the interaction of these forces, varying dramatically with respect to place, is implicit in the motivations for each garden’s development and creates a unique context for the production of a “garden community.” In the later sections of this paper, I critically examine the impacts these gardens—and the respective communities they produce—have within the larger community of the neighborhoods and places in which they are located.

Secondly, with the intent to help bridge the disconnect between food justice and broader social movements, I will engage the Environmental Justice Movement literature as a pathway toward exploring possibilities for mitigating gentrification and the physical displacement of vulnerable people. This endeavor is a direct response to Gottlieb and Fisher’s (1996) claim that—though both the food justice movement and the environmental justice movement have similar agendas concerning empowering vulnerable communities to mitigate day-to-day problems inherent to urban life such as: institutionalized racism; the

commodification of land, water, and energy; unresponsive, unaccountable government policies and regulation; and a lack of resources and power to engage in decision-making (Environmental Health Coalition 2003) —these movements remain separate and their coalition bodies rarely overlap. My hope is that, by learning from the key factors vital to the successes of the environmental justice movement, food justice advocates can better conceptualize and build alternative food initiatives synergistically with marginalized communities and mobilize as a food justice movement to ensure that both food initiatives and communities stay where they are.

COMMUNITY GARDENS AND FOOD JUSTICE ACTIVISM

For over a century, community gardens have, through successive waves of garden movements, fulfilled various needs for American communities, including supplementing food supplies, fostering individual independence, and bringing vivid green space within the decaying urban landscape (Bassett 1981; Kurtz 2001; Lawson 2005). Today, it could be argued that many community gardens and urban agriculture initiatives are primarily driven by activism focused on procuring community food security and food justice (McClintock 2008; Pinderhughes and Perry 1999). These efforts primarily aim to challenge food injustices, especially within lower income communities, made possible and exacerbated by the corporate agri-businesses model that commands the dominant food system, negligent urban planning, and the increasing shortage of effective state food welfare programs.¹ By “demanding democratic control over food production and consumption,” activists and communities fight to reclaim the commons and, thereby,

¹ *First World Hunger* (1997), a set of case studies on food security, was among the first of works to expose and indict wealthy, industrialized, and technologically advanced countries and their respective policy makers for neglecting to redress domestic hunger issues in their purportedly agriculturally productive and food secure climates. Raj Patel’s *Stuffed and Starved* (2008) and Vandana Shiva’s *Stolen Harvest* (2000) describe how the increasing centralization, industrialization, and globalization of the current food system, controlled mainly by a small number of transnational corporations, manages to produce large monocultural yields yet still leaves many low-income populations throughout the world food insecure. Both authors argue that, through the intense homogenization and bioengineering of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and agricultural practices, this hegemonic food system violently degrades local biodiversity, ecologies and ecosystems, livelihoods, heritages, and cultures. These works build largely off of the foundations laid out by Harriet Friedman and Philip McMichael on the “food regime,” (Friedmann 1987, Friedmann and McMichael 1989, McMichael 2009), a geopolitical exercise of power that governs the structure of food systems on a world scale.

dissolve the control that market forces have over basic life goods (Johnston 2008: 11). Thus, central to urban agriculture in the name of food justice is the notion that healthy, safe, and nutritious food is a fundamental human right and its access should not be inhibited by social and economic factors (i.e. lack of transportation, money, supermarkets, etc.).

A recent body of literature explores possibilities for resisting the neoliberalization of the agro-food sector by creating more socially just, sustainable, and re-localized food systems through urban and community-based agriculture initiatives (Allen 1999; Bellows and Hamm 2001; Feenstra 1997; Lyson 2004). These academic contributions both grow out of food justice activism and positively inform and mobilize a burgeoning food justice movement in the U.S., led primarily by middle-class social activists. Indeed, in many cities, such as Baltimore, Oakland, Seattle, and, recently, Miami, food justice activists have responded significantly to government neglect and the resulting emergence of “food deserts” (Cummins and MacIntyre 2002; Wrigley 2002), developing unused or easily available lots into urban agriculture sites.

Julie Guthman’s caustic assessment of these food activist efforts, however, shows that they actually tend to reflect and “reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities” (2008: 1172) by aligning, however inadvertently, with neoliberal logics that promote individual consumption choices, self-help, entrepreneurialism, and localism. Here the “community” – both the collective and the commons – undergoes a transformation into another form of modern individualism; the commons not only become privatized but also attract and produce neoliberal forms of “citizen-subjects” (Pudup 2008). Recent critiques of Guthman’s analysis claim that, in her preoccupation with finding parallels with neoliberalism, she fails to recognize those aspects of urban agriculture that do open possibilities for new food politics (Harris 2009; McClintock 2008). Though some may not agree with Guthman, I find her argument useful in examining the degree to which garden projects are actually radical. Moreover, because community gardens are often a form of co-option of space by activist volunteers and non-profits, it is necessary to use a critical eye in analyzing whether or not these initiatives actually (1) reproduce the structures and logics that support food injustice and (2) gentrify the neighborhoods they intend to empower.

GENTRIFICATION

The concept of gentrification is not easy to pin down and has been the subject of much debate over the past few decades. In many ways, gentrification is more easily observed and felt experientially, especially for low-income communities, than it is explained in all its complexity and in the various forms it has taken within urban areas throughout the world. What is generally agreed upon, however, is that it involves the gradual conversion of working-class districts into middle-class neighborhoods, often resulting in the physical dislocation of low-income communities from the places they have lived for generations. Though a thorough discussion of gentrification would be outside the scope of this paper, I will briefly acknowledge some of the major contributions to the subject matter in the hopes that they will complement each other and lend insight to the case study of Miami.

Neil Smith and David Ley laid out the early foundations for explaining gentrification, putting forth somewhat opposing, though arguably intertwined and dialectic, arguments. Neil Smith's Rent-gap Theory (1987), concerned with capital flows and the production of urban space, describes an economic phenomenon whereby a plot of land's potential value is relatively high in relation to its current actual ground rent, prompting investors and developers to take advantage of a potentially lucrative opportunity and develop the land to its full potential. The theory is primarily used to explain increasing rent gaps between suburban housing, which became the focus of capital intensive developments in the decades following World War II, and urban residential property, which became devalued as a result of the disinvestment in the city's urban core during the same time. On the other hand, David Ley was more interested in the how the socio-cultural characteristics and values of a "new middle class" (1994) – born out of the shift from a manufactured based economy to a service based economy - influenced the post-industrial city and its urban culture. Ley argues that this new class, an educated cadre of artists, teachers, and workers employed in the advanced service industry, gentrifies the inner city through the "aestheticization" (2003) of neighborhoods and demand of particular cultural and social amenities reflective of bourgeois values, i.e. bars, restaurants, art galleries, etc.

Jon Caulfield (1989) discusses how gentrification is linked to the liberation of a marginalized middle-class from the constraining values and structures of “suburbia.” His argument holds that urban gentrifiers look to the city for “new conditions for experience” (1989: 624) and more intensified social networking that the urban sprawl does not foster. Here the inner city appears as what I would call an “unfinished project,” a relic of disinvestment and neglected infrastructure ready to be co-opted, re-envisioned, reformed, and re-materialized through new modes of cultural expression that act in accordance to the values and ethics of a “new middle class.”

Hackworth and Smith (2001) identify three waves of gentrification, each emerging out of recessions during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. While the first two waves involved developers taking advantage of neighborhoods that had been tempered by the “new middle class,” “third wave gentrification” is marked by the overwhelming presence of large-scale corporate developers, partnered with city and state governments, and the orchestration of reinvestment through these partnerships in accordance with a new logic of urban planning (Hackworth and Smith 2001: 468). During the 2000s, gentrification, guised by seemingly harmless vocabulary such as “regeneration,” “revitalization,” and “renewal” within Miami’s urban planning documents, became the basis for city planning policy. This depiction of third-wave gentrification best exemplifies Miami’s experience with reinvestment in the city. It was not until the 2000s that the urban area witnessed a significant growth in population, from 1.1% during the 90s to 11.5% during 2000-2006 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; City of Miami 2004), and became subject to large volumes of capital investment after being “starved” for development during the 1980s and 90s (Gainsborough 2008: 421).

As mentioned, this explication of gentrification is by no means an exhaustive account of the various significant contributions to the subject. As such, there are further dimensions² of gentrification to be explored to fully understand the changes taking place

² Liz Bondi’s contribution of a feminist discourse regarding gentrification complicates the process beyond the traditional class dimension by asserting the significant impact of women in gentrifying urban areas. She posits that the increasing participation of women in the labor force, success of women in obtaining well-paid careers, rates of divorce, average age of marriage, and postponement of bearing children have all factored into women’s increasing independence and reasons to live alone (1991). This has not only contributed to the demand of more housing units overall, but of a specific type of housing: small in comparison to the suburban family residence and centrally located near financial and business districts. Thus,

within Miami. Additionally, the literature on gentrification as a whole requires new research to understand how the process has changed in light of the 2008 housing crisis. As I will discuss later in the paper, this crisis was instrumental to the production of one of the gardens in this case study.

URBAN PLANNING AND NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT IN MIAMI

Since the 1980s, the function of city governments has shifted from a managerial role to an entrepreneurial role, directing their urban development policies towards business and economic development rather than public services (Harvey 1989; Mayer 1994). As a result of “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002), the role of the “non-profit” and the “civic volunteer” has become highly instrumental in the production of urban green space through beautification and urban renewal projects (Pudup 2008). Particularly in Miami, this feature has factored more prominently since the 2000s, when rapid development of the inner city peaked. During this recent housing and high-rise condo boom, the city sanctioned “individual [residential] projects without any sense of how they connect to a larger vision for the city or what existing infrastructure can support” (Gainsborough 2008: 429). Coincidentally, this period also witnessed the largest proliferation of non-profit and volunteer-based community garden projects within the inner city.

To further complicate things, Miami has been described as two different cities: one that recently experienced a boom in high-rise condo and commercial development, fomented by the city, and another whose development³ continues to be neglected by policy makers (Austin 2006; Gainsborough 2008). Quite often, many policy makers push for development in areas *near* low-income neighborhoods rather than in them, claiming that the economic benefits will trickle down to the poorer populations. This idea has been met with skepticism, as many critics argue that these new developments only lead to

gentrification is a combination of class *and* gender processes (Butler and Hamnett, 1994). Though this new dimension is not explored in this paper, it is worthy of a future study, especially in relation to women’s influence and involvement within Miami’s community gardens and food justice movements.

³ I use “development” in the sense that it is part of the discourse of neoliberalism - not in the sense of initiatives in the “developing world.” However, both uses suggest a uniform linear model of change predicated on capitalist and western ideologies of progress.

gentrification, triggering dramatic increases in rents and property values in nearby areas and resulting in the displacement of low-income residents (Gainesborough 2008).

Recently, however, patches of Miami's once neglected areas have also experienced a healthy dose of capital and development. Kitschy condos, renovated building facades, shopping malls, art galleries, and new infrastructure aimed at attracting business have all sprung up along targeted "Community Business Corridors" (City of Miami 2004), sponsored largely by the City of Miami's Consolidated Plan, as part of a larger project to "revitalize" low-income neighborhoods. Additionally, the state funded Enterprise Zone program has offered financial incentives for businesses in Miami-Dade County to relocate or expand within "economically distressed areas" and recruit a percentage⁴ of its workforce from the local community (Miami-Dade County 2011). However, a 2007 report produced by Nissen and Feldman indicates that only an average of 16% of employees at participating companies between 1997 and 2005 were actually residents of Enterprise Zones, and in 2005 alone, only 7% of employees were Enterprise Zone residents, signaling a trend that local hiring declined sharply during the past few years. The failure of these businesses to make any substantial improvements to the high unemployment rates within Miami's low-income communities begs the question: what type of revitalization is actually taking place in these communities? Meanwhile, evidence shows that large portions of Miami's inner city are experiencing processes of gentrification (Feldman 2007). Moreover, it would appear that Miami's government planning policies have wittingly incorporated a rhetoric of "community renewal" as a mask for an essentially neoliberal agenda aimed at fostering a financially attractive climate for capital investment.

If the catchphrases of Miami's urban policy planning in the early 2000s were "urban renewal" and "revitalization," recent plans have almost spontaneously co-opted en vogue phrases like "green" and "sustainable," often used interchangeably, to promote new visions for urban development. In 2010, Miami-Dade County released "GreenPrint," a comprehensive plan for a series of "green" programs and initiatives geared towards

⁴ Prior to 1995, businesses were required to hire 20% of its workforce from the Enterprise Zone in which they were located. In 1995, this ordinance was weakened so that businesses that did not hire any employees from the EZ could still waive half of their property taxes.

developing more “sustainable communities.” After a keyword search for “green,” “sustainable,” and “sustainability,” I found that these terms were used 104, 128, and 188 times respectively within the document, which itself is just 103 pages. These numbers do not include the use of compound words such as “greenhouse” or “Greenprint.”

The document also asserts that, “GreenPrint is not a Miami-Dade County government plan. It is a community plan for all residents, organizations, and businesses” (Miami-Dade County 2010). Though this is a “community plan for all residents,” given Miami’s history of uneven development and lack of democracy regarding policy-making (Gainsborough 2008), it is not unlikely that this government-sponsored development plan, with all its flowery discourse on sustainability and community connectedness, will once again invoke its neoliberal nature and create the conditions for a new wave of capitalist investment and development. Only this time the ethics, and thus the incentives for new businesses, will shift from employing those in low-income communities to incorporating sustainable design in future developments for the purposes of reducing greenhouse gases and combating climate change. This is somewhat understandable, though, since real estate growth has been one of the most significant economic drivers in Miami since the city’s earliest years.

So how does this tie into Miami’s local food movement? A significant portion of GreenPrint addresses a restructuring of the local food system; specific objectives include developing an assessment of potential lots to be transformed into community gardens, amending county codes and creating legislation to enable urban agriculture, increasing local distribution of food through farmer’s markets, and building a network of actors to initiate a local food economy. The implications of this program should not be underestimated. If future developers are successfully able to co-opt, privatize, and monopolize urban agriculture, and subsequently the local food economy, by targeting an affluent class of “green” consumers through “green and sustainable” marketing schemes, how will this bode for the food justice movement and the lower income communities marginalized by their financial inability to thrive within the “green and sustainable” city? I will further discuss these implications after presenting a case study of community gardening in Miami.



Figure 1: New Condo Development Alongside an Abandoned Lot



Figure 2: Freshly Painted "Caribbean" Facades Along a Commercial Business Corridor

METHODS AND FIELD SITES

During the fall and winter of 2010, I worked with a team of researchers on a comparative project exploring urban agriculture in Miami. Together we sought to examine the roles of community gardens within neighborhoods of differing affluence and better understand their relationships with the city, city and county institutions, volunteers, local residents, farmer's markets, and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, we were interested in finding out what types of communities these gardens produced. Who is participating and, possibly more importantly, who is not participating?

During this pilot research, we conducted two semi-structured interviews at each of two gardens: one with the garden leader and another with a garden participant. Since then I have engaged in informal qualitative interviews with several other participants of both gardens as well as prominent actors in the local food scene, including non-profit directors, farmer's market employees, and community residents. Additionally, over the course of multiple visits at each garden we took vegetation surveys, field notes, pictures, and acquired any relevant documentation such as formal garden layout plans, rules and regulations, pamphlets, and flyers. Finally, this data was supplemented with a content analysis of press releases and newspaper articles pertaining to these gardens. Because each practice of data collection made visible a particular aspect of garden "reality," these empirical results were analyzed in tandem with each other, holistically, in the hopes to construct a more meaningful and comprehensive mosaic of understanding.

Currently there is no resource accounting for the exact amount and types of urban agriculture projects in Miami-Dade County. However, through snowball sampling, social networking sites (i.e. Facebook), newspapers, and my own research, networking, and observations, I can confidently estimate, at the time of this writing, that there exist some twelve community gardens, not including food gardens established in primary schools through the Sustainable Schoolyard initiative. The field sites in this case study are as representative of Miami's gardens as possible, in the sense that they reflect the two most prominent types – community-driven gardens within middle class environments and "outsider" food activist-driven gardens within poor neighborhoods.

THE NORTH GARDEN⁵



Figure 3: Preconstructed Garden Beds, Hose, and Shed

⁵ To keep the gardens - and their participants - as anonymous as possible, I have changed the names of all gardens and individuals. Though the pictures reflect actual places and potentially could “give away” their location, all interviewees were happily obliged and proud to have their gardens photographed and included in academic work.



Figure 4: Garden Beds Teeming with a Variety of Crops

The North Garden officially opened on a balmy Sunday in May 2008. Its development came out of series of local parks workshops and community outreach meetings in which city officials and local residents discussed future plans for a vacant, publicly owned parcel of land. Garden manager, Donna, states that these workshops sought to address the Parks and Recreation department's need to fulfill "cleaner, safer, more vibrant Key Intended Outcomes." Overwhelmingly, at these meetings the locals expressed an enthusiastic demand for a community garden over any other option (i.e. a dog park or playground). Two years and \$50,000 later, the city was ready to hold a garden ceremony honoring the installation of nearly one hundred 4x4 and 4x8 raised garden beds contained within preconstructed white borders as well as the full membership⁶ of just as many local residents.

The North Garden is located within an upwardly mobile area. Though many of the residents are by no means wealthy, they do have the means to own or rent condos whose property values are relatively high due to their close proximity to the beach. The racial and

⁶ Membership was acquired on a first come, first serve basis at no financial cost.

ethnic demographics of the neighborhood are somewhat reflective of Miami-Dade County's overall demographics (two-thirds Latino population), but with less of a black population (see Table 1). On a typical day in the garden, one will observe "single parents with kids, college professors, elderly on their own, poor families, yuppies, or time crunched professionals, and retirees" (quote from garden participant), all from the local area. Many enjoy watching the children playfully chase each other with fresh dirt in their hands. They laugh and talk with other neighborhood gardeners as they harvest brightly colored basil leaves, cherry tomatoes, or purple lettuce from their plots. Afterward, they walk back to their condo apartments with fresh produce in hand.

THE CENTRAL GARDEN



Figure 5: Plots Built Out of Found and Recycled Materials at the Central Garden

Whereas the North Garden was built and funded by the City of Miami Beach, the Central Garden's materialization came about entirely through the efforts and capital of the landowners and the support of an extended network of social activist gardeners. It is

situated on private land owned by two friends: an art dealer/collector and a South Beach hair and body care boutique shop owner. The owners initially purchased the property during the rise of the real estate boom hoping to hold onto it long enough to capitalize on the increasing property values before selling it for a profit. But after the collapse of the housing market, and the subsequent devaluation of the property, this goal was no longer feasible. Left with a large piece of land and no prospective buyers, the two owners suddenly shifted their approach from “flipping” a property in an increasingly gentrified area to starting a community garden, with the intent to “address the issues of the food desert” (quote from John, owner and garden leader); “supply jobs... [and] educational opportunities;... bring life, beautification, and commerce” (quote from flyer) to the area; and connect with the local community.



Figure 6: More Garden Growth; Community Business Corridor in the Distance

Unlike the North Garden, here we do not see a streamlined array of prefabricated raised beds, but rather a whimsical spread of irregularly shaped plots. Lined with found and recycled materials such as cinder blocks, driftwood, logs, and wood palettes, the plots often overflow with wild and unmanicured green growth. Plots, available to the community

at-large for a fee of \$45 to cover gas for the water pump, are allocated on a first come, first serve basis. Surrounding the garden is a fence with a lock and a few colorful, handmade signs containing garden information (i.e. contact info, work days, upcoming events) in both English and Creole.

The Central Garden is located within Miami's urban core in a historically Haitian neighborhood of significantly less affluence than the one surrounding the North Garden. While many of the homes have a rustic, and sometimes derelict appearance, the neighborhood's edge borders two "Community Business Corridors" (City of Miami 2004), which have become increasingly subject to renovation and development (notice the bright storefront facades in Fig. 5). It is along one of these borders that the Central Garden sits. Though the median total household income of the area is about three-quarters the median household income of the North Garden neighborhood, the median per capita income is less than half - and well below the poverty line (see Table 1). About two-thirds of residents are black, many of Haitian origin, with the remaining third comprised mostly of Latinos. Interestingly, most of garden's regular patrons are "outsiders," driving from places as far as Miami Beach to be a part of the Central Garden community. In fact, at the time that this research was conducted, only one regular gardener lived in the surrounding neighborhood. Much of the foundations for the Central Garden were laid out with support from other local urban gardeners and food justice non-profit staff - actors who figure prominently within a "network of people who always here about, you know, the community gardens" (quote taken from an interview with Kelly, senior volunteer).

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF THE NORTH AND CENTRAL GARDEN NEIGHBORHOODS

	North Garden Area	Central Garden Area	Miami ⁷
Median Household Income	\$24,535	\$18,887	\$41,367
Per Capita Income	\$17,421	\$8,852	\$22,619
Median Value of Single Family Home	\$195,000	\$65,500	\$277,200
Racial and ethnic characteristics			
- Black	5.8%	64.9%	20.3%
- Latino	67.3%	14.7%	61.1%
- White	18.8%	4.8%	12.4%
- Other	8.1%	15.6%	6.2%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

ANALYSIS OF THE NORTH AND CENTRAL GARDENS

The development of the North and Central Gardens represent Miami's dichotomous, yet uniformly neoliberal, approach to development. The City of Miami Beach held a vested stake in producing a “cleaner, safer, and more vibrant” community. The North Garden serves as a safe, friendly, and creative space for locals to freely relate with each other. One garden participant stated, “It keeps us linked... South Beach may have better crops but we are having more fun.” As it were, the City of Miami Beach supports two other gardens: one in South Beach and another in Mid Beach, two relatively affluent neighborhoods. In an effort to promote a larger sense of community throughout the beach areas, the city sponsors hold special garden events for members of any of its gardens, possibly as a way to bridge the sensibilities, tastes, and values of the North Garden’s community with those of the financially elite South and Mid Beach communities. Taken this way, the linking of these

⁷ Represents the entire county of Miami-Dade.

three beach gardens creates new networks between the respective garden communities, which in turn attracts and *produces* new cultural communities within the City of Miami Beach's comparatively lower income neighborhoods.⁸

One might argue how the government's funding of the North Garden is neoliberal. Though the garden's initial cost was \$50,000, which is actually small change to a city like Miami Beach, through a "hands off, parental role" (quote taken from a garden participant), the city has essentially fostered the conditions for voluntary civic maintenance and monitoring of public green space, possibly saving itself some ten or twenty years of lawn maintenance, landscaping fees, policing, etc.

The Central Garden, however, located within "America's poorest city" (Austin 2006: Introduction), Miami's urban core, could only function in an area that has historically, until very recently, been ignored by development and capital investment. Here, this "community" garden, sponsored, maintained, and funded by middle class social activists, serves as a node within a large network of food justice and local food activists. Kelly, the Central Garden's a senior volunteer mentions,

There has been a lot of connecting with other people going on here, on lots of different levels. I think that overwhelmingly there has been a lot of connecting with people in a community that is way bigger than this neighborhood...There has been a lot of interaction with the other gardens mainly because those gardeners are people who have started them. Everybody's always really curious about all the other gardens and it's always just really good vibes, really supportive and really good...it's a community I feel.

Thus, if we recall Jon Caulfield's work, the inner city serves as a locale for dense social networking, and in this case, for community gardeners looking to build "new conditions for experience." This type of garden project might never work in the suburbs where land values are high and people are content with more traditional green spaces.

⁸ While this might not represent gentrification, it may be one of the preconditions.

While excited about the support and enthusiasm from other community gardens, the owners, however, were slightly disappointed with the response and involvement from the local community. In an interview with a local newspaper, Pam states, “We wanted the kids to learn how to grow and sell. We want to get their parents involved. We had high expectations. You can’t move that quickly because, being a Haitian community, they tend to stay to themselves. It will take us awhile” (taken from article in the Biscayne Times, Griffis 2011). Indeed, Pam and John intended for this garden to serve as a “model for the greater community to learn to do things on their own” (quote from John, owner and garden leader) as well as a “model of urban renewal, [and] a sustainable environment” (quote from a flyer). While well intended, they may not have considered how this garden initiative might resonate with the Haitian community as a reactivation of the Caribbean plantation model in which surplus is extracted from the land (in this case the neighborhood) to be sold on a market to geographically detached middle class consumers.

In some sense, the garden also appears to resemble a microcosm of many international development programs. James Ferguson’s, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), discusses how international development is often enabled by discourses that produce a fantastic notion of the “less-developed country.” Because development programs aim to remedy this imagined reality, they quite often fail to achieve their initial goals. Furthermore, through the creation of infrastructures that they claim would eventually lead to self-sufficiency among the “less-developed” people, they inadvertently allow the state to extend its power and influence throughout new areas.

If this jump in logic and scale seems careless, let us look at the parallels. The Central Garden leaders’ desire to implement a community garden, “supply jobs,” and “bring commerce” within the local community is largely a response to the discourse on food deserts and food insecurity. Though perhaps some elements of these discourses may ring true, there was no empirical assessment or even inquiry within the community prior to prescribing the community garden. What are we to make of the claims that this garden was to bring “life” and “beautification” to the community and serve as a “model for the greater community to learn to do things on their own”? Couched in these claims lies the

assumption that the Haitian community is, essentially, “behind,” lacking vitality, and unable to adequately provide for itself.

Additionally, the question looms whether or not this urban agriculture initiative is playing into the hands of Miami’s government and its larger agenda to deploy a regime of “green and sustainable” development that could serve to further marginalize and gentrify this community. Thus, it is also worthy to note the potential effects of the Central Garden’s tendency to attract and produce a middle-class community of outsiders. Though I myself am guilty of succumbing to the appeal of urban gardening, it is no doubt contributing to the resurgence of interest in Miami’s inner city among middle-class youth and progressives, many of whom are making their first forays into social justice activism through community garden projects. The flooding of a “new middle-class” within urban Miami is profoundly impacting the character of local neighborhoods by recoding them in accordance with new cultural values. Already, hip clubs, bars, coffee shops, indie record stores, and burrito joints are popping up within historically poor areas at an accelerating rate. These cultural stamps will surely not go unnoticed by capitalist developers and those government officials and urban planners who brought us Greenprint.

This is by no means the singlehanded doing of the Central Garden, or even community gardens in general. Additionally, I would like to emphasize that in no way am I suggesting that the owners and participants of the Central Garden do not have the best of intentions for the Haitian community it ultimately seeks to empower. Bridging communities across cultural and racial divides is no easy task. In fact, it is my strong belief that the Central Garden community will learn from its initial oversights and embark on a path of rethinking and revising its agenda in the hopes to truly create a space for reciprocal cultural understanding, appreciation, and collaboration.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

So how can emerging food justice movements help vulnerable communities maintain collective control over space within their neighborhoods without activating processes of gentrification? The strategies deployed by the Environmental Justice Movement can shed much light on struggles faced by food justice activists. Luke Cole and

Sheila Foster's *From the Ground Up* (2001) thoroughly details how the Environmental Justice Movement organized and mobilized minority communities to challenge the colossal institutions responsible for targeting low-income areas as sites to house toxic dumps. Their study indicates that the first critical factor concerned self-representation and agency. The majority of environmental justice leaders and activists shared a lived experience of environmental racism and were able to stand up and act on behalf of their respective communities. Thus, minority groups were essentially able to speak for themselves, their voices channeled through and reinforced by community leaders who had an immediate and material interest in mitigating environmental risks.

The second factor involved a "transformative politics" (Cole and Foster 2001: 151) both on an individual and community level. This began with grassroots groups informing individuals about the issues that affected their lives and how many of these issues stemmed from government policy and capitalist development. Individuals then became educated regarding how they could support grassroots activism and participate in the decision-making process to address these issues. This community involvement in political campaigns sent a bold and clear message to decision-making bodies, which also underwent transformation as a result of the influence wrought by a collective of incensed, yet composed, voices.

The third and final key factor entailed the formation of partnerships with lawyers, litigators, scientists, and academics and the networking with grassroots organizations to create a movement comprised of experts and activists in a diverse range of fields. In this way, lawyers and other technicians assisted in the procedural aspects of environmental decision-making. Furthermore, through a kinetic synergy between community activism and academic support, academics can learn from unique situations on the ground while local residents link their community's struggle to more widespread regional trends.

In linking the Environmental Justice Movement with food justice movements, the lessons learned suggest an imperative for marginalized communities to be able to voice their cultural preferences and traditions, frustrations, and experiences pertaining to food and food access. The Central Garden should have thus focused on understanding and responding to the actual needs of the community before instituting what was to be a

“model of urban renewal.” In order to garner community interest and ownership of garden projects, food justice activists need to build food security projects *with*, rather than *for*, these communities. Furthermore, first-hand, on-the-ground experiences of food injustice within specific neighborhoods can serve to broaden, inform, and possibly challenge food politics discourse. Food justice activists and grassroots groups can then relate these injustices to irresponsible government policy and encourage the community’s political participation in engaging decision-makers to effect change.

At the same time, the role of academics in food justice is not to be overlooked. As Patricia Allen (2008) writes, “Scholars can help to change the way that social conditions are perceived and understood” (160). Injustices such as hunger, malnutrition, and obesity are products of socially constructed institutions, food systems, and markets that exploit the lives of many and cater to a privileged few. Part of becoming empowered involves realizing that dominant social structures and power relations are not a natural, or even stable, facet of reality, but are constantly negotiated and subject to resistance. But beyond producing theoretical contributions within the university, academics with a genuine interest in social justice can also implement praxis as a way to break down the barriers between the ivory tower and the “real world” (Wakefield 2007). A well-developed praxis involves a process of community engagement in which the sole aim is not mere data extraction. Academic activism can instead use research as a tool for forging friendships and democratic collaborations with community members, thereby linking theory and method with experience and social practice.

These steps, however, are not just necessary for the purpose of ensuring community food access. The communities in Miami that have for generations claimed that the inner city may very well be in danger of losing their neighborhoods to the next, and potentially the most reckless, wave of development and gentrification. As such, urban agriculture spaces might also serve as sites for cultivating strategic resistance to other large and pressing issues of social justice, such as affordable housing in the wake of neoliberal development. Thus, the community should be thoroughly involved in the designing, planning, and management of these spaces in order to ensure that their actual needs are

being considered and addressed and that they are collectively taking ownership of a food justice movement.

CONCLUSION

In *Territories of Difference* (2008), Arturo Escobar writes that social movements need to address conflicts by working on three interconnected projects: alternative development, alternative modernities, and alternatives to modernity. He states that the first process should focus on achieving food autonomy and procuring basic needs, the second on maintaining economic, ecological, and cultural differences that characterize the local communities, and the last process on “decoloniality and interculturality predicated on imagining local and regional reconstructions based on such forms of difference. (2008: 199)” Though he has yet to address food movements or urban agriculture in his work, his theory holds up well for food justice movements, not only in Miami but wherever they may be.

As discussed earlier, food inequality largely plagues minority communities. Because these communities have cultural connections to and conceptions of food that often differ profoundly from those of most middle-class urban progressives, urban agriculture activists must be sensitive to these differences in order to prevent the erosion of cultural integrity within the spaces they intend to develop and of the communities they seek to empower. This requires learning their unique histories, traumas, vulnerabilities, and struggles (Linn 1999). Through empathetic compassion, food justice activists and local residents can forge deep, dialectically intercultural relationships that will encourage collective influence and participation in urban agriculture projects. Moreover, this may be a necessary step toward opening the possibility for truly organic and alternative developments to emerge that can foster effective safeguards against gentrification.

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